WORDEATER 48

WORDEATER 48

STAFF

To get a submission printed in this issue, four of the six people on the staff had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

Kim Baxa Judy Belfield
John Bertoletti Shelbia Chandler
Marguerite Flanigan
John Stobart

AWARDS

Prose

*** $25 to Len Overcash**

Poetry

*** $25 to Judy Belfield**

Covers

Artists whose cover designs are accepted for an issue are usually awarded $10 each for front and back covers, or a total of $20. An anonymous artist submitted the covers for this issue. We thank you, Anonymous, but we are unable to award you the $20.

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 49 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

September 21, 1984

Manuscripts will not be returned and SHOULD BE TYPED.

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NEXT TWO DEADLINES:

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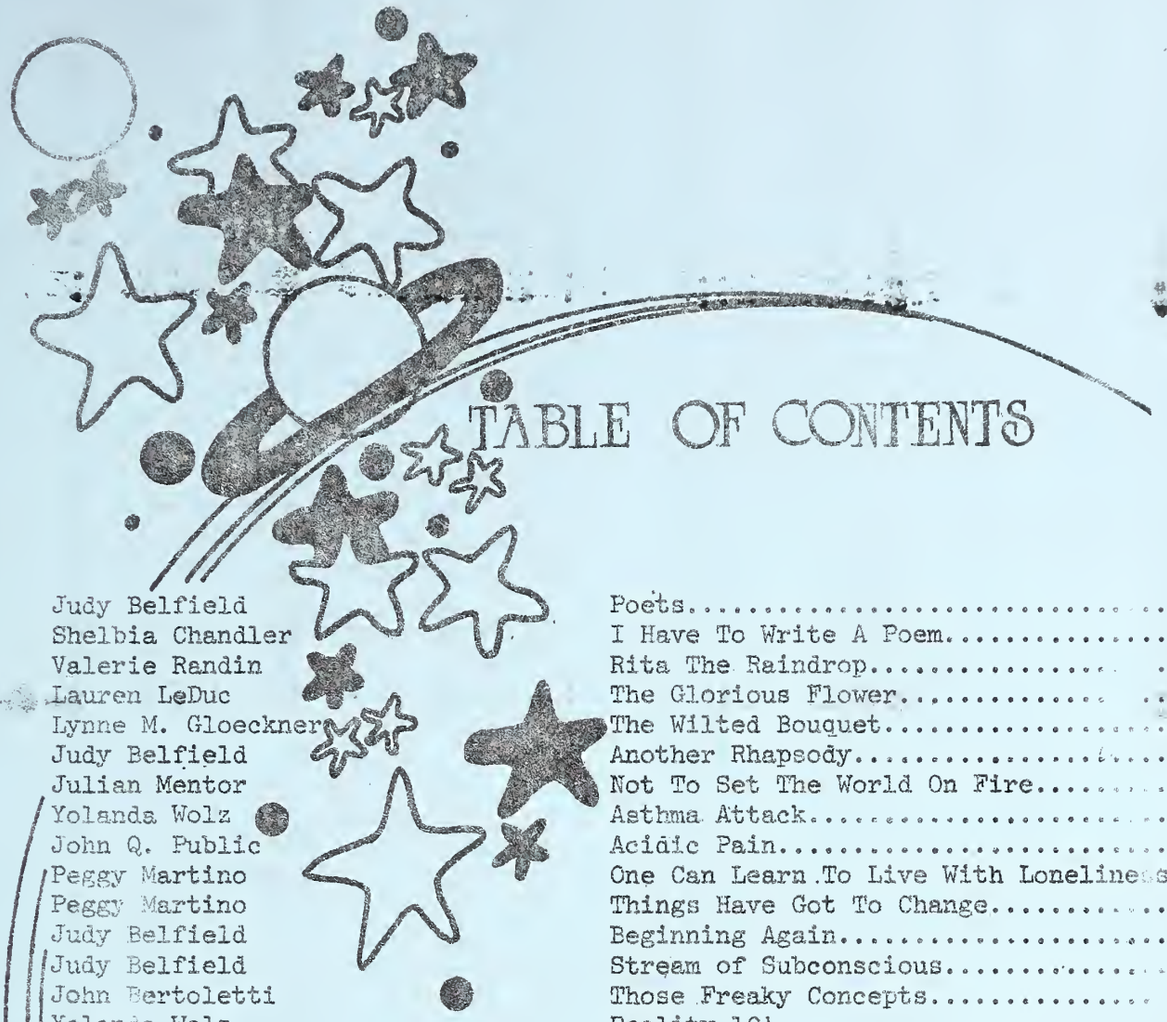

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Judy Belfield

POETS

They might be crazy
with their visions
and coinings of words.
Certainly rhyme-time
and created worlds
are symptoms
all psychiatrists recognize.
So what separates the versifier
from the psychotic?
Perhaps he is anchored to reality
more satisfactorily
than those who've taken the leap . . .

but ask a poet what reality is,
then wonder about the anchor.

****

Valerie Randin

RITA THE RAINDROP

Once on a very lazy day, I had a memorable experience. I sat, sad and lonely, at a window and watched the rain pour down. I studied my mother's red rose bush very carefully. It was covered with beautiful raindrops. The drops glistened of all kinds of colors. But one raindrop stood out from all the rest.

Curiously, I looked at it. It was a girl raindrop. She glimmered and laughed. Wow! The raindrop laughed! Then she smiled at me. The beautiful raindrop that glistened ofpurply purple, pitty pat pink, rootin' tootin' red and green green smiled at me! I smiled back and waved.

All of the sudden, I had an idea. I went to the kitchen, got a small glass, then pulled on my raincoat. I went outside. There I saw the lovely raindrop that glistened of purply purple, pitty-pat pink, tootin' rootin' red and green green. I put the glass under the rose petal the raindrop was on, then I shook the rose. The colorful raindrop fell into the small glass. I ran into the house.

Once I was in the house, I studied the glistening purply purple, pitty-pat pink, tootin' rootin' red, green green raindrop. Something terrible was happening! The raindrop colors were different. The purple wasn't so purply. The pink wasn't as pitty-pat as before. The red wasn't very tootin' rootin, and the green wasn't green at all, and the raindrop wasn't smiling anymore.

I set the glass with the raindrop in it beside my bed that night, before I went to sleep.

The next morning I checked the raindrop to see if the beautiful colors had come back into her. She was gone! I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and looked again. No raindrop. The beautiful raindrop was really gone. I ran to the window and looked out. It was raining again. I looked at my mother's rose bush and there on the biggest rose was the raindrop.

She smiled and glistened. What a lovely sight. Once again, she sparkled of purply purple, pitty-pat pink, tootin' rootin' red and green green. I smiled as I watched her play and laugh. I had an idea. I slipped on some boots and ran outside with my small glass. When I got to the rose bush, I saw the raindrop look more beautiful than it ever did before. She glimmered of the purpliest of purples, the pitty-pattest of pink, the tootin' rootin'est of reds and the greenest of greens. I remembered what happened before when I put her in the glass. I realized the raindrop would never be as pretty in the glass as it was on the rose petals. So I whispered to the raindrop, "You're beautiful. Too bad we can't be friends.

Then the raindrop whispered back, "We can be friends. Leave me in the sun on this rose petal, so I can be

(continued

Shelbia Chandler

I HAVE TO WRITE A POEM

I have to write a poem
But I'm not sure I know how
I'd rather write it later
But they say it must be now

I've never written poetry
I'm not sure how to start
The only thing I'm sure of
Is that it must come from the heart

I have to write a poem
But I don't know what to write
Should I write about the world
In the early morning light?

There are many things to write about
Which subjects suit me best?
Should I speak of lovely forests
And of sunsets in the west?

I'm really trying
But it's so hard to write
I search for solutions
There are none in sight

Everyone says
There's nothing to it
Maybe I just
Don't want to do it

In fact I know that
That's for true
But this is it
The poem is through.

****

Rita The Raindrop, continued

beautiful for your and glisten purply purple, pitty-pat pink, tootin' rootin' red and green green."

I told her my name was Cindy and she told me her name was Rita.

I rushed back into the house and looked out at the window at Rita. She smiled and played. She was really happy. My new friend, Rita the Raindrop, was really happy. And so was I.

****

Lauren LeDuc

THE GLORIOUS FLOWER

Mud--spring is mud
And rain--spring is rain
And crocuses--they're so simple
And pure and fresh
How can they come up
Amid snow showers and cold
How can they defy nature
And say to the world
"Quit it, winter,
I'm coming whether you like it or not
I'm going to be beautiful anyway"
How glorious a tiny flower can be
To defy all that mess of a spring

****

Lynne M. Gloeckner

THE WILTED BOUQUET

The spring air warmed us,
as we played amongst my flowers.
You picked them gently,
wanitng to only bask in the sun
and enjoy their sweet nectar.
With every caress my perfume became more fragrant,
filling my senses with images of forever.
We frolicked in the tall grass;
laughing, caring, loving the hours away.
Just the two of us, hidden from the threatening
weather that crept up on us.
Suddenly the dark sky opened and the cold winds
blew you away from me.
Alone in the field, I scurried to pick up
my silken array and the crumpled petals that
we had strewn so haphazardly.
Drenched to the skin, you left me exposed.
My buds being snapped off by the torment of the storm.
Dashing for shelter, I searched for a vase;
I hastened to keep our love alive.
Why had you plucked so many blossoms,
if you were afraid of the rain?

****

Judy Belfield

ANOTHER RHAPSODY

Blue down here
Gershwin and me.
On my back floating
in piano music,
sea-wave melody
taking me under . . .
me and water and George
on Valentine's Day blue.
Sometimes I think
it's only me here--
reach out with blue arms
and touch nothing.
In my ears
a blue piano sea . . .

I want to sleep.

****

Julian Mentor

NOT TO SET THE WORLD ON FIRE

"Not to set the world on fire,"
Was a wish of my love in the night.
Or can I get very much higher?

For if not, then I am but a liar;
A mere image that reflects no light--
Not to set the world on fire.

I professed a birth on a pyre,
And she saw the strangeness of my sight'
Or can I get very much higher?

No days to struggle in the mire,
Or make much of time. I have the right
Not to set the world on fire.

In her arms, I saw tears fall dryer
Than diamonds that sparkled in their height.
Or can I get very much higher?

Forked into whatness, I can aspire,
But unchartered and denied the fright?
Not to set the world on fire,
Or can I get very much higher?

****

Yolanda Wolz

ASTHMA ATTACK

Depression
Soul compression
Heartbeat suppression
as breathing becomes labored
and pains are savored.
Past and present
none too pleasant
as they meet
they complete
the defeat
of the lonely soul
the only soul
that is me.

****

Peggy Martino

ONE CAN LEARN TO LIVE WITH LONELINESS

One can learn to live with loneliness and use it to be the company of others. One knows what it's like to be paranoid, confused, depressed, and vulnerable. How can one be vulnerable if one does not open onesself up to be? For people who put themselves up in isolated euphoria, they are really communicating in reality. They may not allow themselves any type of emotional communication but, by their isolation, they witness the giving and receiving of others. They take in all emotions and in that way they fulfill the emptiness of their own. But as they are witnessing, they have set themselves up for the greatest fall of all. For, through making themself 'unreachable' and heartless, they make themself vulnerable. How, you may ask? Simply by being too 'tight' with all their expressions. They finally reach a point where the know loosens and the 'precious' untouchable contents of the 'inside' person pours out. It finally escapes, opening up the person's emotions . . . and making them vulnerable.

Time can pass before one realizes that all along they've been shutting people out and closing off the outlet of their own emotions. And all this time, setting themself up to fall. Why can one control every other aspect of their being but vulnerability? Simple, because it is something of time, fate and of life.

****

John Q. Public

ACIDIC PAIN

Acid rain,
Teardrops so plain,
No one cares to complain.
An absence of action
Seems somehow insane.
Acid rain,
Come wash away our dreams,
We will watch in awe
As nature screams.
Powerful men
Make mock regulations,
People of this planet
Feel angry vibrations.
We will miss you, Mother Nature
When we realize you've left.

****

Peggy Martino

THINGS HAVE GOT TO CHANGE

Things have got to change
They must
They will
We can't stop time
Nor can we stop change
It's inevitable
Life--
With all its newcomings
Where does it lead
Where has it been
Can we determine our outcome
Or is it fate and change that leads
Can we describe our past
Or is it only meant for us to understand
Things change
--YES--
We can't alter our past
Nor can we determine our total future
We can, however, live the present.

****

Judy Belfield

BEGINNING AGAIN

I sip today
carefully
from its thin glass;
today--warm, intoxicating,
singing the note
of finger to crystal lip . . .
I sip carefully
today's liquid morning,
soothing the shakes of yesterday
into a soft, lulling tremor
which rocks me through the afternoon
and into the long night . . .
If I can just sip today
slowly,
carefully savoring the taste,
Perhaps I won't need
to smash the glass against the wall.

****

Judy Belfield

STREAM OF SUBCONSCIOUS

Last day for warning--
the surgeon general
has five stars
on a tobacco can . . .
ahses to ashes
smoke to smoke,
can't get a lesson
in fascism
from some dictator
who needs summing up:
an explanation for the plan
a plan to explain
the lost last yesterday . . .
Warning: the surgeon general
has determined your life
and the direction
your soles will take
after that next puff
of acrid poison
skullboned crosses
like the iodine
we used to drink
on the rocks in Kentucky--
bourbon Berbers,
hang us all--
if only we'd heard
the warning
and the quick trot
of regret
breaking from the gate
and runnin' ahead
of the silk and surrey--
surly burley gold leaf
smoking in the fields
like a hamshank
and this is the last day
for your chuggin lungs
to heed the warning
while the surgeon general
eats sturgeon babies
and generalizes the grand plan
into a solemn dirge--
words grave and final . . .
From dust thou art
and into dust thou shalt return:
the dust cakes and bowls
of lost yesterday
blown across the land
like 30's topsoil--
grains of sweetblack earth
turned gray
settled in a ragged pantscuff
and waiting for the water--
Save me, Jesus,
the day is lost
like the ash of life
burnt yesterday on a cigarette
that carried the warning
I couldn't read.

****

John Bertoletti

THOSE FREAKY CONCEPTS

The poems are produced
from my out-of-synch brain.
I'd have to agree if
you called me insane.
But I like it weird,
different, and strange.
It's an off-the-wall
style I'd rather not change.
My imagination flies
on a twisted-loop rout
where uncanny thoughts
and ideas jump about.

****

Yolanda Wolz

REALITY 101

Today's lecture is on the choice we all make.

People are like flowers. Each starts from a seed, puts out roots and eventually pushes his way out of the earth (its womb) into the real world.

In the real world there are many kinds of flowers. Some are green, leafy, and simple; others are colorful, all petals and buds. A flower might be green or pink, big or small, bright or dull. It might have three petals or a dozen. Even in flowers that have the same coloring, number of leaves, and same kind of petals, there are subtle variations.

In the real world there is somethir called society. Society likes to pass judgments. It awards blue ribbons to roses because roses signify their ideal of beauty and goodness. Spider-plants, meanwhile, are relegated to sun porches and apartment windows because they don't fit society's ideal of beauty and goodness, even though they may be beautiful and good in their own right.

Unfortunately many a spider plant himself will believe he has the choice of being society's rose or his own self. But each person is himself irregardless of society's will. He isn't given that choice. The choice he is given is much harder because he must answer to himself first and to society second.

He must choose to either accept himself or deny himself. If he accepts himself, he is able to grow strong, proud, free. He will flower in the

(continued)

beauty of self love. If he denies himself, he will fall into self-destruction of his mind, body, and soul. He will wither in the anger of self-hatred.

Study Questions:

1. Are you a rose or a spider pland? Why?
2. What choice have you made?

****

Peggy Martino

TIME--IT WILL NEVER STAND STILL

TIME--it will never stand still. No matter how hard we try, we can never seem to drag out that second in our lives to an eternalized moment. Or can we? A second is just a space in time but the memory of that second--the feeling of it--lasts forever. One that will be in the heart of the time-keeper for eternity.

****

Judy Belfield

DRINKING BUDDIES

I rub shoulders with Time,
drink from the same bottle,
sing lusty tavern songs
in two-part harmony
until the words slur into tomorrow
and our laughter drowns the hour.

Time and I
are killing ourselves.
Night after night
a yellow gaiety rollicks,
raucous in the black backstreets,
a jukebox and ice-clinking glasses--
muffled echoes signing a pact,
a covenant of concrete and abstract
shoulder to shoulder, bleary-eyed,
each anticipating
the sudden collapse of the ether.

****

Liz Knapp

I NEED YOU

Your doubt
My mind
Your loyalty
My honesty
Your love
My passions.

Your faithfulness
My excuses
Your confusion
My pain
Your hurt
my empathy.

Your feelings
My choice
Your shoulder
My tears
Your wanting
My needing.

****

John Bertoletti

SATURDAY NIGHT YOUNG

Struttin my white patent-leather
steppers as the vibrant blue
leopard-skin tie rides my
bright cotton shirt that smells
really fresh.
The white shorts are comfy
and the tan's looking deep.
Moose River Hummer's stimulate
as we party on the terrace
overlooking the lake.
Someone's cutting rocks inside
and we check out the stars
off the water and feel fun.

****

John Bertoletti

ARCTIC DANCING

If you ever want to dance around,
to boogie-out, or shake the ground,
I know a place where you can go,
a land of ice and wind and snow.
Yes, in the ARctic, when you're there,
You'll shake from toe to end of hair,
and move in ways you never could--
as dancing goes, you'll be quite good.
But,
It doesn't last for very long,
so please don't play another song,
unless you want to be a stiff,
an icicle, or crusty drift.
Yea, Arttic dancing can be fun
but leaves you frozen, blue, and numb.

****

Lynne M. Gloeckner

WHY IS EVERYONE RUSSIAN?

Fast are your feet, as you rush on your way.
Your face expressionless, rutted with years
of pain.

Head covered and eyes hidden by the kerchief
that you wear.
Drab spirits and heavy wraps conceal the inner
feelings which you guard so incessantly.

Do you not know that this is the land of the
free,
the land of opportunity?
You need not live a life of fear, a life of
want.

Your solemn mood stilldepicts the air of the
iron curtain.
Your eyes still dart back and forth with
suspicion.

Clutching at your scanty possessions like
rancid potatoes; you express your affect-
tions as if they were skeletal rations.

Have faith, Comrade! Lift your face to the
red sky and breathe in the warmth of the sun.
Let down your golden hair, take off your
heavy boots.

Though your arms race to cover your oppressed
future, only a dictator
of his own heart would choose to miss the
chance to find and enfold the love of a
friend.

****

Judy Belfield

HOPE AND HORROR

A slow walk
to the window,
curtains fluttering
in a sweetgrass breeze,
a glance across the fields
coming fresh again
in this, "cruelest month,"
a heavy sigh
at the portal of a lavendar world . . .

heavier still
the walk into darkness.

****

Judy Belfield

DISCRIMINATION: A STATE OF MIND

Say you love me
or don't--
I don't care
as long as you stay the night.
Tomorrow, when you're gone,
I won't think about you anyway--
it doesn't matter;
I don't care
as long as you stay the night.
You're nothing special,
neither am I--
there are plenty of you's
and plenty of me's.
We'll all get together some day
or not--
I don't care
as long as you stay the night.

****

John Bertoletti

AND IT'S ALL SUCH A BLUR

He is repeated confronted
with alien trials,
testing, questioning, attacking
all facets of his thought and belief.
Confusion tackles his strides of
self-revelation as
standards and models tap him
on the shoulder.
His young brain spins and it's
all such a blur.

****

Judy Belfield

GODS

We back away
and into dreams retreat,
each to a separate place
of serene isolation,
there to lie back
in flower cushions
and create the day anew.

****

Lauren LeDuc

GUILT

Should you have held him
In your arms at the end
And forgotten all of the past

Could you put aside the
Feeling of bitterness
That permeated your being

Now that it's over
Must you wish
That it had been different

Can't you let go of it
Push it out of your mind
Will it stay with your forever

Will you travel through life
Waiting 'til your souls meet
So you can say, "I loved you."

****

Yolanda Wolz

MEMORIES

I see them
the distortions
otherwise known as memories
made more bearable
by white lies.
But can you see
the difference
between truth and memory?
I'm not sure anymore.
I think there must be
a fine dividing line.
Somewhere . . .
I can't see it.
Maybe I forgot where it was.

****

Lauren LeDuc

THE VOICE

Soft for a baby
Harsh for a sinner
Mellow for a friend
Seductive for a lover

****

Marcia Ballun

CONFESSION

I was thirty-six when I wed.
Tom was fifty-nine.
All my family disapproved of him.
Why did they despise him so?
I knew that Tom was older.
He already had four grown children.

Was it his outspokenness?
But,
If it weren't for this,
My family would never have taken me back.
It was he who went to the farm.
He knew that they despised him,
But he still spoke out for me.
He said,
"Take back Louise,
She is of your own flesh and blood."
I am forever grateful to Tom.

We enjoyed a long and happy marriage.
Then,
In his eighty-seventh year he died.
My heart was lost.
He had been the closest person in my life.
I was hollow without him.

I died two years later.
My death certificate read "heart failure".
How true it was.

****

Judy Belfield

ANOTHER GREAT AWAKENING

There is a "time for every season,"
and the book which tells it
will be placed on the shelf
with the words of sorcerers
one day
and we will smile,
some of us with ties to the past,
at the ignorance of man
and his too-long childhood;
others will flinch and disbelieve,
or cut themselves off from history--
but I speak to them from now:
it is here and cannot be ignored,
a lesson in patience
learned by all who know and pass through
before the great liberation.

****

Shelbia Chandler

BILLY'S PRAYER

Dear God,

My daddy says Mommy's with you
And he tried to tell me why
But I just can't seem to understand
Why my mommy had to die.
Was it cuz you were lonely
And had no mommy of your own,
Or was it just that Mommy wanted
to leave Billy all alone?

Aunt Sara said Mommy will miss us
And that she didn't want to go
And that You needed her in Heaven
But, God, I miss her so.
She sayssince You're a kind man
We'll see her again someday
But Mommy can't come for a visit
Because Heaven's too far away
Grandma says I should be glad
And I should try not to cry
Cuz Mommy is very happy
In her home in the sky.
But how can Mommy be happy
Without her little Billy
And who will be the mommy

To my little sister Tillie
Tillie came the day
My mommy went away
So Mommy doesn't know
That a baby came to stay.
In church the man said,
"Pray to make things all right."
So I'm trying really hard
To pray to You tonight
But daddy said Mommy can't come home,
And I gotta try and understand.
He says we'll all get by
If we hold each others' hands
I'm gonna listen to my Daddy
Cuz Daddy tells the truth
Not like Mary Hudson
And Tony's sister Ruth
So God take care of Mommy
Be good, don't make her sad.
And remember, don't be sassy
Cuz sparks fly when Mommy gets mad.
Someday I'll die and see her,
And I hope she'll remember Billy
Daddy says I'm crazy
"Forget, Billy. That's silly."

****

Anonymous

BROKEN BONES AND OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

"Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" is filled with "do-wop" harmonies and a catchy melody. It is the kind of ditty that makes you want to snap your fingers, but Neil Sedaka was wrong.

"Breaking Up Is HArd To Do" has becoeme a popular phrase for the unfortunate couples who are parting company, but breaking us is easy. Getting through the time immediately following the break is hardest to do.

Actually, breaking up is a relatively quick process. The actual phrase used to break off the relationship only lasts about ten seconds, unless the "breakee" has an abnormally slow rate of speech.

Bang! Pow! That's all it takes to make the break. The problem is that the two broken members hang around too long after the break. Instead of going for help (or a suitable weapon) they both wallow in their misery. If this simple step could be eliminated, the transition would be much easier.

The lexicon of disbanding contains many standard phrases. "The magic is gone," is still one of the popular, with a number of words substituted for "magic". "I need some space to find myself," became very popular during the late sixties and seems to be making a comeback. The words are not as important as the image they convey.

People leaving a relationship fall into three categories. The "roses", the "stompers," and the "martyrs." The "roses" try to buy you off with a fancy dinner and a show, that will make them look like a wonderful being. The "stompers" only want to make you feel inadequate by preying on your weak points. The last category is where most people fall. They try and make you feel like they are breaking up with your for your own good. "You deserve someone better; I'm not good enough for you" are common martyr jargon.

An experienced "breakee" will quickly recognize one of the above ploys, and attempt to frustrate the breaker's plans. If someone is going to hurt you, you might as well make it as difficult as possible for them.

There are several types of breaks. "Clean breaks" are the easiest to recover from, but unfortunatley don't occur very often. The most frequent break is the "Green-stick" break. This usually occurs when your ex-partner wants to continue to see you as well as date everyone in town. The breakee is so overcome by that "green-eyed monster" that he beats the offender with a stick.

Information on some of the new breaks being developed are not yet available due to the rapid technological gains. Thanks to science and the media, people are now able to break up quicker and more efficiently than ever before.

After the break is over, there are really only two things left to do: Exact revenge or get on with life. Standard revenge is outdated, not to mention illegal. The best way to get

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revenge on your ex-lovers is to be nice to them. Nothing bothers a person more than having someone they hurt be nice th them. It is only fair to make them feel like they made a big mistake by breaking up with you. Besides, they are always going to be wondering if you are plotting something devious.

The best plan is not even to bother with the other person. Take a cruise, go out on the town, or find somebody new. While you are out having such a good time, perhaps you could listen to some music. Maybe listening to "Breaking Up Is HArd To Do" would be good for a few laughs while you sun yourself by the ocean with a cool drink.

NOTE: "Broken Bones and Other Relationships"is an essay that was written as a Final Exam in Rhetoric.

****

Lauren LeDuc

A SISTER

A sister is to love
When you hate what she is
    thinking
    doing
    saying
A sister is to stay away from
When you could so easily
    interfere
A sister is to talk to
When no one else could possibly
    understand her
A sister is a thorn in your side
When she is an embarrassment you would
    never abandon

***

SELF

I'm selfish--me first
Eat the most, don't worry 'bout
What's left for the rest
Any wish I have
Do it my way
Why shouldn't I, it's mine
Never let anyone else into my realm
Cause then I couldn't say
"Why should I, you have nothing

A MOTHER

Only a mother knows
How a mother loves
Men can write about it
And talk about it
But they can't know

A child thinks he knows
Because he receives it
But he really doesn't know

Only a mother knows
What it's like to hold
Her child at her breast
And feel the nearness

Only a mother knows
What the feeling of life
Moving inside her is like

Only a mother knows
How a mother loves
What a figt to be a mother
To be able to love that much

***

To do with it"
I'm selfish

****

John Q. Public

THE HIDDEN MEANING

In the photograph, he has captured the scene. And although you may not wish to remember that moment, it is forever imprinted for anyone to see. You are in the photograph along with others. So nonchalant and so free.

Perhaps you are trapped, but you may also be free, in someone's two-dimensional application of a dream.

When he is feeling down, he studies the picture, often this means missing out on meals, homework, and the watching of TV.

And when he is in a boasting mood, he may show the picture to some of his close friends. It often makes the others envision what it would have been like had they been in the photo too. But what in the photograph makes them feel envy and what makes the photographer and owner of the image so happy?

Perhaps because the picture shows a view of the photographer's world or because it contains there for all to

(continued)

The Hidden Meaning, continued

see, a slice of life and an excerpt of the hazy past.

For whatever reason, if indeed there is one, the photograph in question is very valued to the photographer. He carries it around with him, most anywhere he goes. Except when he goes swimming, to job interviews, and of course, on that all-important first date with someone new, when impressions really matter.

You know, you don't want to be labeled "different" until you know each other well enough. It just gets down to the fact that you don't want to scare off your first date and make a negative impression. What would happen if she asked what it was for and why you brought it? You couldn't take it swimming too often because it would get wet and then dry and start to become folded and worn. Also, colors may fade and with the structure of the photography blurring, so may the memroies and significance of that moment so well captured.

You may be turned down a job, if you brought the picture with you as habit. And this could lead to bad feelings between you and the boss anyway. Of course, the photographer in question has different versions of the same shot. A big one, which covers one whole side of his bedroom, one that occcpies the ceiling and many versions just hanging or sitting around. He makes some copies for his friends, family and loved ones. He could make quite a little profit, but he chooses just to give and not to receive. A wallet-sized shot sits in his sweetheart's wallet. Which sits inside a loaded-down purse. The standard 8x10 size is made and handed out with relative ease and minor expense.

He gives that photograph which he treasures as a gift and to those who can give his photograph a good home.

Why does he carry this particular shot around and why does he smile unconsciously when anyone mentions it? No one is quite sure. Perhaps, the photographer feels that people ask too many questions in hopes of finding out what is unknown. Questioning everything may just demean and obscure any real meaning and action, so his actions may be his way of saying, "I'm doing what I want to and it has little or no meaning."

On the other hand, there may be a deep-rooted mental problem here but we should not always be the ones to judge. So time and time again, the photographer shoots to capture, and when he does it is his own trip. And he may carry this certain photo with him, till his final days.

****

Judy Belfield

THE SECRET

One morning the nurse
Opened the curtains
And the day trickled in--
Too parched to flow--
And gray shadows
Seeped through the sheets,
Touched your yellow leg.
We knew then
What would follow.
When it came,
Quietly caressing your neck,
You closed your eyes
To keep the secret
You couldn't tell
Or I couldn't hear . . .

Which was it?

****

Len Overcash

SPOTTING A MURDER

Frank Bates wanted to see Carol and tell her that he'd made everything all right between them again. He would forgive her if she would come back. But he didn't know where she was. That was the first thing he decided to do when he got away--find her and bring her back home where she belonged. She was his alone again. Peter Mead was now slumped against the dashboard of this, his expensive, brand-new sports car, harmless.

Best of all, Frank hadn't been seen. He could merely drive away and nobody would stop him. He could go home, but Carol wasn't there--Mead had sent her away and now couldn't tell him where she was.

(continued)

"But you won't have Carol now," Frank muttered softly to the unhearing Mead. "Not now. And all of your money won't do you any good either. You can't buy yourself back from death."

Through the windshield, Frank watched the large white fiberglass sign that rose above the exclusive restaurant flash on, then off, then on again. The small world around him, bleached to a pale-purple hue by the overhead lamp at the edge of the parking lot seemed almost an illusion. The sports car was parked far away from the restaurant, away from everything. Isolated at the edge of this shiny black asphalt, surrounded by the dark quiet hulks of other longer, taller buildings. As if in a box canyon.

The hour was very late. The lot was almost empty. Frank could see a dim light coming through the window of the kitchen door and assumed that the few remaining cars belonged to the employees still inside. He listened to the sounds of the summer night through the open side window and noticed them unchanging. He could get away easily.

In death, Peter Mead was a much better person. He no longer bragged about how wealthy he was, or how he was expanding his stock portfolio, or investing in real estate. Nor did he flash his diamond rings under Frank's nose, or bring out those "little trinkets," those old, valuable coins, gold lighters and such that he fanatically carried with him and brought out when given the slightest opportunity. Frank had worked an improvement on the man.

And he had gotten revenge. Mead's fourth (fifth?) wife, Linda, had been one of Carol's high school friends and that's how they became acquainted. Frank disliked Mead immediately. Hated the constant bragging, the haughty laughter, and the extravagant lifestyle, but tolerated all of it to please Carol, who was deeply impressed, And, truthfully, for himself too. He dreamed often of being able to live that self-indulgently. But he wondered how he could have failed to recognize the signals: Carol coming home so late every night, always visiting at their mansion across town, suddenly having expensive jewelry and clothes that they could not afford on his salary as an accountant for a small firm. At first, he thought Carol had kleptomania because he never received any bills--now he knew.

Whenever he thought about them together, his anger flared. Tonight . . . tonight he had lost control. He had just listened too much, especially the arrogance when Mead told him he had sent Carol away. Frank had been unable to control the overwhelming impulse to silence the man. The spasms had started in his fingers and rolled up this thin arms. They they had done it.

Frank became aware of the ache in his forearms and realized how tightly he was gripping the leather-wrapped steering wheel. He released his right hand and held it, palm up, before his face, The mercury-vapor glow blanched out the warm, pink, human tint, and turned it into a livid, cold thing attached at the end of his wrist. It no longer seemed to be the slender, womanish hand of an accountant. Something had happened to it. The left hand was the same way.

They had done it. He couldn't do it. They had taken over. He was just an accountant, an innocent man with an unfaithful wife, and murderous hands. He couldn't reverse what his hands had done, couldn't squeeze the spark of life back into Mead, so he must get away carefully. Get away and find Carol and tell her he had made everything right between the m again.

He saw a sparkle of light and suddenly the back door to the restaurant swung open. Several people came out, their voices making soft ripples on the night air. Frank grabbed the steering wheel again, ready to drive off if any of them came toward him, but they paid no attention.

After they were gone, Frank let his breath rush from him in a long sigh. The whole night had been so different from any other. It had started suspiciously when Carol hadn't been there to pick him up after work--Mead had. And driving this low-slung sports car, his newest $40 thousand toy. A strange coincidence Frank though even then, but Carol had failed to show. His calls home went unanswered. so he accepted Mead's offer of a ride.

Instead of taking him home, Mead brought him here to Altman's Club. One of those secluded restaurants on the western outskirts of town. Mead said he wanted to buy a drink to celebrate the purchase of the finest sports car that money could buy. The drink turned into a long, boring ordeal.

But it was over now, and Frank knew that he must quickly decide how to escape. Frank looked at the digital watch on his left wrist and noticed that his fingers left small, moist dots on the leather. He released his right hand, more dots.

He took out his handkerchief and scrubbed at the spots vigorously. He realized that he could not leave without removing all signs that he'd been here--and what better signs of his presence than his own fingerprints! Each place and each thing he had touched inside the car had his marks. Again, with fevered energy, he swabbed the wheel.

"Jeeze!" he muttered, leaning back in his seat. He closed his eyes for a few seconds of thought. He must rub everything, must polish away all of his fingerprints, and he must not hurry and risk missing even one.

Frank rubbed the handkerchief firmly over the chrome-plated gearshift lever, then looked at Mead beside him in the other bucket seat. His prints would be on the throat. He moved his hand toward the body. It trembled so badly that he couldn't touch it. He looked at his hands again, wondering how they could squeeze out the life, but not remove

(continued)

the evidence.

He turned away, recalling what had happened during this evening.

The conversation between them was forced and monotonously one-sided. Mead had seemed especially animated and friendly. He took command immediately, ordering everything they ate and drank. He had brought along a seemingly endless supply of his "little trinkets" which began coming out after the first drink. The antique diamond-studded cigar case, 24-carat gold, had impressed him most, but the other things, those rare Civil War coins, the scrolled pocket watch, the diamond stick-pins, the ivory cigar holder, or the garish rings on six of his fingers didn't. Frank considered himself to be a man of simpler tastes. His dreams, though many, were strictly middle-class.

Frank continually glanced at his watch and made remarks about how late it was getting. Several times he had called home, but still there was no answer. He grew worried and suspicious. He felt trapped, and when the drinks and the boring conversation became too unbearable, he demanded to be taken home. To his surprise, Mead agreed.

Frank leaned forward and rubbed the handkerchief along the radio knobs.

Mead was quite drunk and Frank had to physically support him and lead him to the car.

"You'll have to drive, Frankie-boy," Mead had slurred and forced the keys into his hands. "Be the first time you ever drove anything this fancy, huh? Better than that cheap little Dodge of yours. Cost more than four of them."

As Frank was inserting the key into the ignition, Mead told him, "Carol's not home, Frankie-boy."

"How do you know?" Frank asked, feeling a little bit of fear ice in the pit of his stomach. "She's . . . she's probably at your house . . . with Linda."

"I kicked Linda out three days ago. Carol has gone away to wait for me. We're going to file for divorce. Both of us."

Frank opened the car door and polished the handle repeatedly.

"Just like that," he muttered as he worked. "Gone away. Just gone away."

He climbed out of the car and closed the door as quietly as possible. He scoured the outside handle to a glossy brilliance. Then he wiped the whole door.

"Why Carol?" Frank had asked. "Why the only woman I've ever loved? You've got enough money to buy any woman you want, Mead, so why Carol?"

Mead ignored the questions. "We . . . Carol and I . . . have decided to offer you a substantial sum not to contest the divorce."

"I don't want your filthy money!" Frank remembered screaming. It was then that his hands began clenching and squeezing the steering wheel.

"Carol said you were a fool," Mead said to him, doing nothing to hide the disgust at the refusal of an offer of his precious money. "She was exactly right in her prediction of your reaction, too. Obviously, you are determined to remain average. And to cling to something that no longer exists. Carol doesn't love you--hasn't for quite a while. Who can blame her? What have you got to offer her that rivals my wealth? She told me of your plans and dreams for the two of you--you are amusing, Frank."

Frank lost control after that. His hands took complete control. Strangely, Mead hardly resisted at all.

Frank walked around the front of the sports car to the other side. When he touched the handle, the trembling started again. He would have to force himself to open the passenger door. Closing his eyes, he flung the door open and began wrestling with Mead's limp, overweight corpse. It was almost beyond what he could manage, but he pried it out enough to let gravity pull it the rest of the way.

After rolling Mead a few feet away, he sat down on the blacktop. Frank Bates, a small, thin man, accustomed to lifting nothing heavier than a ledger, was getting close to the limits of his strength.

The minutes of the night were rushing quickly by, but he knew he could not hurry and possibly miss even one single, vital, invisible print. Frank looked at the body, which lay like a broken toy on the blacktop, then at his hands. He flexed them and they responded but felt cold, very cold. He realized that they must be kept busy.

A loud noise suddenly echoed between the buildings. Frank leaped to his feet, expecting fo find himself surrounded by police. Nobody was in sight. When he heard the noise again, he ducked behind the open car door, peering cautiously though the windshield. He was sure someone was prowling around and thought of running. Then he noticed movement, a flash of pale color next to an overturned garbage can. Soon a fat white dog pulled its head from the can and sniffed the air. His heart was pounding, but Frank laughed.

Tired or not, he told himself, he must soon finish.

Returning to the task, he swabbed the entire passenger compartment, the glovebox and its contents, the ashtray, and even the carpeting. When he was finished, he closed the door and wiped the handle.

Now for Mead. Kneeling, fighting

(continued)

the repulsion of working with Mead's contorted face staring at him, Frank mopped the neck until satisfied that all the evidence was wiped away. But what about the things in the pockets? Those expensive trinkets he remembered handling. And Mead's sportcoat when he helped him into the car--would the fabric hold fingerprints? Frank didn't know.

Perspiration flowed fiercely as Frank attacked and tore at the garments until Mead was naked. Exposed to the world, Mead looked hideous and wax-like under the mercury-vapor glow. Frank dry-washed the entire corpse with the dirty handkerchief. He was very careful not to retouch the cooling flesh.

His arms and hands protested with cramps and spasms when he was done. They wanted to stop. He expected something like that from them. After what they'd done, they didn't seem to want to help him escape. He wondered if he could trust them anymore. He must keep them busy, so he went immediately to the pile of clothes.

Though his hands had turned against him, his eyes increased their aid They acted as magnifiers, allowing him to study each item, each coin, the gold lighter and cigar case, until completely convinced of its cleanliness.

Finally, much later, he dropped the last object, a penny, on the pile beside the nude body. He was positive that no prints eluded him. He stood up slowly, forcing the knotted muscles of his thin legs to support him. All of the muscles in his body ached from the tedious work, but he wasn't finished yet. The car was waiting.

The filthy rag curried the bumpers, the sloping hood, the head and taillights, the fenders, and doors until the car was a streaked, foggy mirror. He worked until his tired eyes told him that none of his distinct marks were imprinted on the paint, forgotten.

He was done. He could leave now, but he was exhausted. Frank closed his tired, strained eyes. He needed a few minutes rest. Not long though, just enough to regain his strength. He slumped down on the blacktop, his back against the car.

When he opened his eyes again, he saw them in the first light of dawn. Millions of them were scattered through out the parking lot. His fingerprints covered everything He glanced at those hands--they had done this. They had strangled Mead and now wanted him to pay for their crime. But Frank was too smart for them. He had his rag and would rub and rub and rub until everyone of the prints were wiped away again

The eastern sky grew steadily brighter. The sun would be full above the horizon soon to help him see the prints better. Good, it was time to get started.

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Shelbia Chandler

I NEVER EVEN SAW YOUR FACE

I never even saw your face
I don't know your name
You're part of my fantasies
But real all the same.

Hardly a day goes by
When I don't think of you
Although we've never met
I know that I love you.

You gave me life
I thank you for that.
Although you couldn't keep me
You didn't leave me flat.

Rather than abort me
You found a family
To give me food and shelter
And all the love I need.

Sometimes I wonder about you
Tryin' hard to see your face
But I'd never try and find you
Since I'm happy in this place.

My foster parents love me
And I've never had a doubt
That to them I'm their own child
Whom their world revolves about.

As I've said before I love you
So I hope I don't sound unkind
But thank you for giving me up
And making these nice people mine.

Tomorrow it all becomes legal
I'm as happy as I can be
I only hope you realize
You did what was best for me.

****

John Bertoletti

SYNTHETIC SIGHT

I thought he was an eraser but
the hole was too big.
He's kind of bumpy but the point
is I've drawn in some eyeballs
and given him sight.
I have given my pink frog sight.
The ungrateful waste. I just
might melt the little hunk of molded
rubber.
But he'd see me and I'd freak,
even though I am the miracle
worker of the artificial amphibious
world, generously sketching newfound
perception with my magical pen
of vision.

****

Shelbia Chandler

I KNEW SHE WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME

I knew she wouldn't believe me. I was sure even as I spoke, but I had no choice. I was beginning to crack and unless I told someone I would surely go crazy.

I waited until Martha had gone to work. She worked at a factory in Chicago and it would be late when she returned. As I had a free day, Grandma and I would be alone.

When Martha's car pulled away, I left my room and went downstairs in search of Grandma. I found her in the kitchen, her graying head bent over potatoes and other vegetables as she chopped them to make soup. She hummed the old song she always when she was content. I looked at her lovingly for a time. I felt bad because I knew that I was about to take away her good spirits. I loved Grandma and I didn't want to cause her pain.

I must have moved or made some kind of sound because Grandma looked up, smiled, and motioned for me to come in and sit at the table. I moved slowly across the room and took the chair she had indicated. I sat in silence for a long time wondering how I should begin the conversation.

Grandma looked up. "Is something wrong Lynn? It is unlike you to be so quiet. Come on, tell Grandma what the trouble is."

I remained silent for a time still not knowing how to begin. Grandma looked at me for a minute, she tried to read my face. Being unable to gain anything she went back to chopping vegetables and glancing at me from time to time to see if I was ready to open up.

After what must have seemed like an eternity Grandma could stand it no longer. She sighed, put down her knife, walked over to my chair, lifted my chin to her face, and stared into my eyes.

"Lynn," she said, "I know that you must have come down here to talk. You look as though the end of the world has come. Will you do me a big favor? Either tell me the problem or stop standing around looking like a sick animal."

I looked at Grandma tears welling up in my eyes. "I'm afraid to tell you, Gran. I'm sure you won't believe me. It sounds like a lie, and I'm not sure I could bear it if you doubted me."

"What makes you so sure that I won't believe you? Have I ever doubted you before?"

I sighed. "No Grandma, but this is different. Martha said you wouldn't believe me. She said you would call me a fool and never speak to me again. I don't want you not to love me, Gran. I'm afraid."

Grandma looked surprised. "Your mother has a lot to learn about me. So do you, Princess. Don't you understand that Grandma will always love you, no matter what. I love you for who you are, not because of what you do. Can you see that now?"

I nodded and hugged her tight. She held me close for a few minutes, then pushed me away a bit to see my face.

"Come on, now . . . tell me what's wrong."

(continued)

Liz Knapp

WEIRD SIGHTS AT THE F.F.

It's 4 am and I have no sleep
I look out my window and see a creep.
He's walking around with bags in hand.
Check it out--it's the sandman!
Am I awake or is this a dream?
I look again at what I've seen.
The bags say Tootsie and he wears a
frown.
Run kids, run--it's Kinko the Clown!
The kids run by carrying 99 balloons,
but they're not kids, they're dead
baboons!
I blink my eyes and flash my light,
but here they come, those men in white!
I start to scream and pinch my arm,
but I'm too late, here at the Funny
Farm!

****

Lauren LeDuc

HA-HA-HA

His laugh
Not heard at all when they are only two
Just a smile after telling a smutty
joke
A sarcastic ha-ha-ha after verbal
abuse
A forced ha-ha-ha that's not so real is
A form of entertainment for the baby
His laugh
Heard only a few times genuinely

****

I Knew She Wouldn't Believe Me, continued

I looked down at the floor as I began to tell my story. Grandma placed her arm around me, but I could only remain looking at the floor.

"Gran, it wasn't my fault honestly. Martha says it is, but really it couldn't be. It all started last year. Remember when Aunt Becky had her baby. You went down to help because she was ill afterwards. Martha and I were all alone here for two weeks."

"I remember," said Grandma. "That was when you stopped calling your mother Mama, and started calling her by her name. When I asked about it, she said that she preferred it that way. She said it made her feel younger."

"Well, Gran, while you were gone, Martha began doing things to me. I begged her not to, but she said that as my mother, it was her right to do as she wanted. She told me that she earned that right when she spent eleven hours in labor trying to give birth to me."

Fire seemed to come from Grandma's eyes, but when she spoke, her voice was calm. "I don't understand what you mean. What kind of things did your mother do?"

My knees began to shake and I was more afraid than ever. I wished that the floor was opened and swallow me. Grandma reached for my hands and her eyes seemed to force me to go on.

"When you came back, she stopped. I thought it was all over, but last night she started again. She came into my room just like Mon the nights when you were gone. She leaned over my bed and gently shook me awake. She didn't want to startle me because she thought I might yell and scare you.

"She said that she was going to do something to me, and if I told, she would beat me first chance she got. She also told me how much you would hate me if I told and how it might kill you."

"We've already covered that," said Grandma. "Now tell me what Martha did to you. I assure, I'm not going to die from bad news."

I took a deep breath and continued. "She came into my room and put her hands on my body. She felt my body and acted like she was a man. The first time, I was surprised, I had not idea that women did that to other women. Gran, I don't know how to make her stop. I feel so dirty. She said that I made her do it, but she didn't say how. I'm thirteen and I understand something about incest, but I never expected to find it in my mother." seemed angry but distant. I grew more afraid. I was sure that she had overestimated herself and hated me after all. I turned away tears nearly choking me.

When I reached the doorway I felt something touch my arm. I turned around and found Gran behind me. She held out her arms to me, and I fell into them, crying like an infant.

"My poor, poor Princess," she murmured. "I should have known. It isn't your fault. Your mother was ill once, a long time ago. I knew that, and I tried to watch for the signs. I thought I saw some a couple of times, but I guess I succeeded in changing my mind. I didn't want you to be hurt, but I guess I didn't do well enough. I'm sorry, Princess."

Grandma, too, had tears in her eyes I looked at her and felt better. She had believed me after all, I knew I could stop worrying. Grandma still loved me and always would. I put my arms around her and together we sat down to talk our problems out. Deep inside, I knew the worst was over.

****

John Q. Public

OPEN EYES/BRIGHT SKIES

Drifting
Like a kite up in the clouds
Out of control, climbin' out of sight
While others gather to wave good-bye.
Swifting
Through Patterns of lies and confusion,
Search for some proof to support a truth,
H Hear what you say--
Then see what you mean;
By listening to your eyes.
Gliding
Along the pathways of life, day by day
No time for anything outside of you,
Pain and solitude
No awareness of the magnitude of life.
S liding
Down the rails of agin
Towards regret and self-pity,
If you were to question your life,
You may find some meaning
In the beauty you pass by.

****

Lauren LeDuc

STAGEPLAY

The scene is in the office of an old rectory in Oakwood, a small town in the suburban area near Chicago's O'Hare Field. On stage L there are windows opening onto the front lawn of the rectory. On stage R There are two chairs facing the desk which is at center. At the rear there are double doors leading to the hall, the dining room and the stairs. When the curtain rises, it is about 7:30 p.m.m on a warm September evening. The windows are open. Father Chris is reading, seated at the desk, dressed casually in a sweat suit. Lilly enters from the dining room carrying a tray with a ptticher of iced tea and a glass.

Lilly: Here you go, Father Chris. Something to cool you off after all that running. Iced cold tea.

Fr. Chris: Thanks, Lilly. It'll taste good. The caffeine might perk me up. I'm exhausted after that last mile. Guess I'm not really in shape.

Lilly: Oh, I think that joggin' is too much for you. Now you take it easy for awhile. I'll be on my way to get your priestly clothes ready for your meetin' tomorrow with those Lutherans. Ya gotta look your best if we're ever goin't to get together.

Fr. Chris: Oh, Lilly, you remind me of my mother, keeping tabs on me like that.

Lilly: Well, somebody has to take care of you men. You don't have a wife to do it. Well, now, I'll see if Father Francis would like some tea. This heat seems to have got to him.

(Lilly exits rear) Fr. Chris gets up, walks to window, gazes out. Suddenly he looks startled, as he sees someone coming up the walk. The doorbell rings.)

Fr. Chris: (calling) I'll get it, Lilly.

(Fr. Chris opens door. Enter Beth Alexander, an attractive young woman, and Steve Matthews, her fiancee.)

Fr. Chris: Beth! Beth! It's you. I can't believe it's you. How are you? (Fr. Chris appears flustered.)

Beth: Christopher McIntyre! What are you doing here? My God, I haven't seen you in so long. Chris, you haven't changed. You look wonderful. (Beth grasps both of his hands, pauses.) Uh, I'm sorry,

Judy Belfield

BACK TO THE POINT

And if God created,
it was not Adam
or earth
but an idea
like Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon."

We have placed ourselves
outside the canvas,
you and I,
observers standing too close.
We step back
to see the rowers on the lake
or the distant white umbrella,
removing ourselves even further.

We will never understand
until we return
to one of the dots of paint.

****

this is Steve, Steve Matthews. (Turning to Steve) Steve, this is an old friend, Chris McIntyre.

(Fr. Chris and Steve shake hands.)

Fr. Chris: Come in. Come on in and sit down. (Beth and Steve sit in chairs) It's great to see you. What are you doing in Oakwood?

Beth: Well, I moved here to be within driving distance from the airport. I'm a stewardess for United, and, well, it is a small town and not too far away from my folks.

Fr. Chris: And how are they? Does your dad still run the cafe?

Beth: Oh sure, why they just enlarged it. They added a whole new dining room with a place for dancing. Just like the old Roadside Inn. Remember that place?

Fr. Chris: How could I forget! Spent the better part of my life there busing the tables. I know you remember that. You were the best waitress they had. We had a good time, didn't we? (laughing)

Beth: We sure did--

Steve: (sarcastically) Well, I guess this is old home week. Maybe I should turn around and come back in to get into this conversation.

Beth: Oh, I'm sorry, honey. It's just that Chris and I go way back- Why I haven't seen Chris since--well, for a few years. Chris,--what are you doing here?

(continued)

Fr. Chris: (stammering) Well, Bets, I--I--I'm the assistant pastor.

Beth: (quietly) The--assistant pastor. Oh. I didn't know you--you did this. I didn't know--(her voice falls away.)

Steve: (firmly and with a jealous tone) Well, that's great because we need an assistant pastor. We want to get married. And soon.

Chris: (stands up and paces around the room) Well--er--there's quite a bit to it now, Steve. It's not quite so simple.

Steve: Oh yeah? What do you mean by that?

Chris: Now you have to wait six months if you want to get married in the church.

Steve: Six months! For what! You must be kidding! (Steve gets up angrily)

Beth: Chris, why do they have this rule now?

Chris: Well, Bets, it's just to make sure that people don't rush into anything--to be sure--.

Steve: What's this 'Bets' stuff. Her name is Beth.

Beth: Oh, Steve, Chris always called me that. It's pretty hard to forget nicknames. You know how old friends are.

(Telephone rings. Chris answers.)

Chris: St. Wilhemina's, Father McIntyre here. May I halp you? Oh my gosh, I forgot the meeting. I'll be right there. Thanks for calling. (Hangs up the phone) I'm really sorry. I forgot a parish meeting tonight. Let me call you tomorrow and we'll talk more.

Steve: (irritated) Let's go, Beth. See you tomorrow, Father McIntyre.

Beth: Here's my number, Chris. (fumbles in purse. Takes out business card. Hands it to Chris.) Goodbye.

Steve: Let's go, Beth. (Impatiently)

Chris: Goodbye Steve. (softly) Goodbye, Beth.

(Chris offers his hand to Steve. Steve ignores it, turns, grabs Beth's arm and walks out. Chris closes the door after them, looks out window, contemplates as he watches them go down the walk.)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

The scene is in Beth and Jennifer's apartment. It is furnished with modern furniture, a sectional sofa, glass tables, contemporary paintings and a United Airline poster on the rear wall. There is an outside door at stage R and a door leading to the bedroom at stage L. Beth is reclined on the sofa, dressed in a stewardess' unfform. Beth is crying. Jennifer is comforting her.

Jennifer: Get hold of yourself, Beth. He's a priest. That's it. He's a priest. You're not going to change anything. Accept it.

Beth: Jennifer, I can't. What will I do? I thought I'd never see him again. And then he pops up out of nowhere. Now--at the moment I thought I could forget him by marrying Steve, he shows up and comes back into my life. (whimpering) It took me seven years to get over him--and now this--

Jennifer: He's taken vows, Beth. They don't take those lightly. And it's been a long time since you were together.

Beth: He--he just disappeared from my life. I didn't know what happened. He was there and he loved me. Then suddenly he was gone. I didn't hear from him. Nothing.

Jennifer: Maybe that was for the best. Maybe it was meant to be.

Beth: No! No! Jenny, you should have seen how he looked at me today.

Jennifer: Beth, you've promised Steve you'd marry him. Think of what you're saying. Steve doesn't deserve this.

Beth: There are some things that never change, Jenny. I know Chris still loves me. I know it. I could feel the electricity between us.

Jennifer: Beth--he's a priest.

Beth: It doesn't matter. I've got to see him again--alone. I have to know what is happening--and--what happened seven years ago. (tears come down her cheeks)

Jennifer: Why don't you get some sleep, sweetie. You'll feel better in the morning. We have an early flight. I'll wake you up in time. Try to get some rest. I'm going out for awhile. See you in the morning.

(Jennifer picks up her coat, goes out door, R. Beth sits on sofa and stares into space. A long pause. A soft knock on the door. Beth gets up slowly, walks to door, opens it. Chris enters wearing jeans and a sport shirt.)

(continued)

Beth: Chris!

Chris: Bets, I had to talk to you--alone. May I come in?

Beth: Of course Chris, please come in.

(Chris and Beth move toward center stage. They both talk at once.)

Chris: Bets, I want to tell you--

Beth: Chris, I have to say this--

(They both laugh)

Beth: You first, Chris--

Chris: Bets, if you're wondering why I'm here, It's because I had to tell you that I made a decision about seven years ago to go to the seminary, and I couldn't bring myself to tell you. I'm sorry. I wish you hadn't found out about it this way. I didn't want to hurt you, and I didn't know how to cope with it. I guess I just ran away from you. The fact that I did that has been haunting me all this time. And when I saw you today, I just couldn't believe it. I'm telling you all this, I guess, to ease my conscience. I don't know--

Beth: It's all right, Chris. I understnad. You did what you thought you had to do.

Chris: Well, you could say that. And I--I took some vows that meant I couldn't have all the worldly things I wanted to have. I had to decide which was more important--my desire to serve God--or my feelings for you. I knew that my decision would hurt you, so I guess I took the easy way out, and just left town. Now that I see you again, I realize that what I did probably hurt you more. Tonight, Beth, I wonder if I made the right choice.

Beth: Chris, you made a choice and I guess we'll have to live with it.

Chris: But there's something I have to know. Do you really love this guy, Steve?

Beth: Why, of--of course I do. He's very good to me. He has a good job. He's an engineer, you know, and has a great future. We'll have a lot of money and--(Beth breaks down in tears) Oh, Chris, those things don't mean a thing. You know that I still love you, don't you, Chris--When I saw you, I could hardly--hardly--(Beth sobs uncontrollably).

Chris: Bets, don't. Don't cry, Bets.

(Chris puts his arms round Beth to comfort her and gradually his fatherly gesture changes. He turns her toward him and lifts her chin. He gently kisses her on the mouth. Beth reacts and begins to kiss Chriss passionately. Chris breaks away.)

Chris: Bets--Bets--we can't do this. I--I've Kgot to leave before we're both sorry.

Beth: Oh, Chris--

Chris: I'll get in touch with you. Maybe we can meet someplace where we can talk this out where no one will see us. Maybe the park. Spruce Park--at the fountain. It's quiet and secluded there. Maybe we can make some sense out of all this.

Beth: I have a flight out tomorrow. But I'll be back in four days.

Chris: Thursday night then, at the fountain at ten. Okay, Bets? (He puts his hands on her cheeks, holding her face up to his.) It's better than here--it's better than here (looking toward the bedroom).

Beth: All right, Chris.

(Chris exits)

Beth: (to herself) Chris--Chris--you were shivering. And I could feel you--you were excited.

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

The scene is in the rectory office the next evening. Father Francis is seated at the desk. Father Chris is pacing around the room. They are both dressed in black suits with Roman collars. Windows are shut. Lights low. It is about ten o'clock in the evening.

Fr. Fran: That was quite a crowd tonight at the mixing of both the Catholics and the Lutherans, wasn't it, Father Chris?

Chris: Oh--oh--yes, Father, it was.

Fr. Fran: Chris, Chris, my boy, you're not listening to a word I'm saying, are ya? What's the matter? You're goin' ta wear out the carpet. Will you stop pacin'.

Chris: Oh, I'm sorry, FAther. I guess I'm just upset, that's all.

Fr. Fran: Upset, eh? Upset about what?

Chris: About what? About what? I'm upset with the Chruch, Father, with the rules, with the fact that in order to serve God, you have to do it the Church's way. Who said that the

(continued)

have to do it the Church's way. Who said that the Church's way was God's way? I'm angry, Father.

Fr. Fran: You're young, my boy. You'll understand as time goes on. It takes commitment to be a priest. It's not easy. Not everyone can accept that fact. At some time in our lives, we all ask ourselves these questions. What has brought you to this restlessness?

Chris: Father, it's hard for me to tell you. You wouldn't understand.

Fr. Fran: I wouldn't? I was in love once.

Chris: You know, then?

Fr. Fran: Son, women come and women go, but God stays forever. He will never hurt you, or leave you.

Chris: You were in love--and you were hurt.

Fr. Fran: I am human, too, Chris. I chose God not because I was hurt, but because it satisfied my need to serve others in a way that is different from any other. But that was for me. You have your own choice, depending on your own needs.

Chris: Father, seven years ago, I chose God, but now I don't know what I want. I've seen my love again, and it's like I never left her. I want her, Father, but I want the Church. What am I going to do?

Fr. Fran: Only you can answer that. Pray, my son. Pray for help in your decision. God doesn't want you to be unhappy. He loves you. You can serve him in many ways. There are those outside the Church who are holier than those of us in the collar.

Chris: I don't know--

Fr. Fran: C'mon son, let's turn in. We'll pray about it tonight. Let's get upstairs before Lilly is after us for staying up too late--

(Fr. Fran and Fr. Chris exit rear to stairs)

CURTAIN

ACT II
SCENE I

The scene is at Beth and Jennifer's apartment three days later about 10 o'clock in the evening. Jennifer is at stage L putting flowers in a vase on the sofa table. There is a pounding at the door. Jenny rushes to answer the door at stage R. Enter Steve.)

Steve: Jenny, where's Beth? Where is she? I've been calling all night, and there's been no answer. I know her flight came in early today. Now, where is she? (raising his voice) Is she with him?

Jenny: Steve, calm down. I don't have any idea where Beth is. I just came in from O'Hare. Got these beautiful flowers at the airport. This room needed something to cheer it up, don't you think? Do you like them?

Steve: (ignoring Jenny's small talk) She couldn't stop looking at him that way. I haven't been able to think of anything else. I know something is going on. I know it!

Jenny: Stop talking so insanely jealous. Who and what are you talking about?

Steve: You know who I'm talking about. That priest. McIntyre. I saw the way he looked at her, and the way she looked at him. Jennifer, she knew him from before.

Jenny: So what's wrong with that? We all knew somebody from before.

Steve: Something is going on and if I'm right, he won't live long enough to ever look at her again.

Jenny: Steve, you're acting crazy. They just met again after all those years. It doesn't mean a thing. They're old friends.

Steve: Friends, eh? Well, friends don't look at each other like that. I know a guy on the make when I see him.

Jenny: Steve--

Steve: Jenny, it was never that way with you. You wouldn't have looked at anyone else. You were loyal to me. I was the one who wasn't loyal. I know where this guy's coming from. Remember when it was you and me--and then Beth moved in with you with that beautiful body and beautiful face--remember, Jenny? And you never told her about us--

Jenny: That's all in the past now, Steve, in the past. Beth is loyal to you.

Steve: They're together, aren't they--arentt they, Jenny? (Steve's voice gets louder. He excitedly grabs Jenny and pulls her close to him. He shouts.) Tell me, Jenny, where are they?

(continued)

Jenny: (Reacting to being close to Steve, Jenny pulls away slightly. She thinks calculatingly, and slowly answers Steve, still in his hold.) They are at Spruce Park, by the fountain. They met there at ten. Just to talk, Steve, just to talk.

(Sheve releases Jenny roughly. Jenny breathes deeply. Steve moves toward the door deliberatley as if thinking)

Steve: He'll be sorry. He'll be sorry.

(Exit Steve, Jenny realizes what she has said and dashes out the door after him.)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

This scene takes place at Spruce Park at about ten o'clock the same night. Backdrop shows a fountain. There is a metal fence around it. A park bench is at stage R. A small (nursery) tree with bushy branches is at stage L. Lights are low. Beth is sitting on bench waiting. Enter Chris.

Chris: There you are. I've been walking around waiting for you.

Beth: I must have just missed you. I've been here a few minutes. Isn't it a gorgeous night? An early Indian summer, I guess.

Chris: Yeah, I guess. Beth, you're beautiful in the moonlight. I had forgotten just how beautiful you are- I guess when God put you together, he pulled out all the stops.

Beth: Funny how God seems to get into all your conversations, Chris. It seems you're obsessed with Him. I believe in God, too, but I don't let him get in the way of anything.

Chris: Beth, I don't think you understand. God is a part of my very existence. I guess I relate everything and everybody to Him. It just seems natural.

Beth: I know. I guess that's why I--I love you so much. You have such deep feeling and understanding. Do you have some understanding about me?

Chris: Yes, I think I do. I think you--no, I'll say--we--are trying to capture something that is long gone. It was a beautiful thing--the love that we had--but time has passed. Other forces have made a deep impression on both of us. I've found great satisfaction in being a part of the Lord's service. I've found great joy in doing His work. And I've really only just started it. I don't know what is to come, but I'm eager to find out.

Beth: You sound so idealistic, Chris. Don't you deserve something for yourself? Don't you need someone to love you as a man, not as a priest? Just because you are a priest doesn't stop you from having desire, does it?

Chris: No, it doesn't, Bhth. That is something I'm going to have to fight all of my life. I'm fighting it now.

Beth: Chris, don't fight it tonight. I need to touch you. I need to feel you. I want to show you the love I've had for you for seven years. Chris, I can't deny that love. Time hasn't changed anything.

Chris: And what about Steve?

Beth: I don't want to talk about Steve, or to think about him.

Chris: You'll have to think about him. He's part of all this.

Beth: No, Chris. Steve was a substitute for you, and a poor one, at that. I'd looked for a substitute for a long time, and couldn't find anyone anywhere near you. Steve seemed to love me so much. He just wouldn't let up until I say yes, I'd marry him. What I feel for Steve isn't remotely related to what I feel and have felt for seven years for you.

Chris: I'll have to admit that when I saw you with him I was feeling pangs of jealousy. Bets, I thought about you a lot while I was in the seminary. And a whole lot just before my ordination. But I was sure you were happily married by then. I couldn't conceive of the fact that you would still be in love with me.

Beth: Oh, Chris--hold me. Please hold me. Just for a minute.

Chris: Beth, I can't. I can't let myself feel your body next to mine. I want you too much.

Beth: Chris--

(Beth puts her arms around Crhis and begins to kiss him lightly on his face. He responds to her and holds her in a long embrace. They part. Chris moves away from Beth.)

Chris: Beth, I have to tell you that I've decided that I can't ever see you again. Even though I love you, Beth I want to be a priest. I can't have both you and the priesthodd. I know this hurts you, and it is killing me to tell you this, but I have to. Something deep inside of

(continued)

me is pulling me to God. But I'll always love you, Beth.

Beth: I'll never understand it, Chris, but I guess I'll have to accept it. I guess there's not much more to say. Would you--kiss me again--just one last time?

Chris: You don't know hew much I want to do that.

(Chris kisses Beth passionately for a long time. Steve enters, stands behind tree, observes passionate kiss of Beth and Chris.)

Steve: (coming out from behind tree) You son of a bitch! Leave her alone!

(Steve jumps Chris, starts fighting him. Chris returns the blows. Beth runs away stage L. Chris is hit hard and stays on the gournd. Jenny appears stage R.)

Jen-y: Steve! Stop! Stop it! He's down. Don't hit him again. Steve--come on. Come home with me.

(Jenny pulls Steve toward her, and drags him away off stage L)

Steve: (screaming as he exits) God damned son of a bitch. I hope he's dead!

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

This scene takes place in the church. The door is at stage R. There is a stained glass window at rear. There is a kneeler at stage R. Another kneeler is at stage L, with a frame above it on which a curtain is hung. There is a chair on the opposite side of the curtained kneeler. There is a pew in center stage toward the rear. It is four o'clock the next day. Chris is slowly walking around at center stage. He is wearing a cassock with a stole. He finally walks over to the kneeler at stage R and kneels to pray.

(Enter Father Francis)

Fr. Fran: Father Chris! Father Chris! I'm sorry to inter-upt your meditation, but I must. Lilly tells me that you were hurt, and had bumps and bruises. What happened? Are you all right? You don't have to hear confessions if you're feelin' poorly. I'll take them for you. Now come over here and tell me what's been goin' on.

Fr. Chris: Nothing, Father. I'm going to hear confessions. That's my duty. But I suppose what I really need to do is to have you hear mine. I'm prayin' now to be worthy enough to give absolution to anyone. Father, I'm not good enough to be a priest.

Fr. Fran: None of us is perfect, Chris. We all have faults.

Chris: Father, I saw her and kissed her. I wanted to make love to her.

Fr. Fran: The Lord will forgive you, Chris, and He will help you to keep your vows, if that's what you want. You only need to ask him for help.

Ghris: That's what I've been praying for. Go on, F'ther, I'm all right. I'll be along after confessions. I'll tell you all that happened, then. Go on. This is your time for rest.

Fr. Fran: All right, Ghris.

(Exit Fr. Francis.)

(Chris goes to confessional, the kneeler at stage L. He sits down behind curtain and waits. Steve enters stage R. He walks slowly to stage L. He kneels on kneeler of confessional. Curtain is drawn so that Chris cannot see who is on the other side.)

Steve: Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I want to kill a man.

(Chris is visably taken aback as he recognizes Steve's voice.)

Steve: THis man has taken away the only person I've ever loved.

Fr. Chris: You probably have misunderstood. What you see is not always the way it is.

Steve: It's no use. I'm too full of hate. I can't stop myself.

Chris: Remember that God loves you and wants to help you to forgive.

Steve: It's too late for forgiving.

(Steve quickly pushes curtain aside, draws gun and shoots Fr. Chris. Chris falls to side, clutching his chest. Steve runs off stage R. Sees Jenny, stops momentarily and continues running offstage. Enter Jenny.)

Jenny: (shouting) Steve--what happened? Chris--oh Chris--Oh my God.

(Jenny kneels next to Chris and cradles his head in her arms. Chris speaks softly.)

Chris: Why did you tell him where we were, Jenny. Why did you tell him?

Jenny: Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. You know I've always loved him and wanted him for myself--

(Lights Out. Curtain)

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Judy Belfield

THE END OF THE LINE

"D'ya think he'll be here?" asked JoJo.

"He's always here. We just hafta wait," said Carol.

"What if he's sick or something?"

"He'll be here. It's only quarter after three."

Two fifteen-year-old girls stood in front of Woolworth's Five and Dime after having stepped off a bus marked "Special." Each carried a neat stack of books and dangled a largish purse. They were dressed identically--mute-toned, plaid, copiously pleated, wool skirts rolled over at the waist, hiking them two inches above their knees, black, wool, tailored blazers over starch-collared, white, cotton-broadcloth blouses, crew-knit bobby socks, and black penny loafers. It was the uniform of St. Francis Academy, a Catholic high school for girls. The skirts, according to regulation, were supposed to fall one inch below the bottom of the knee. The regulation was broken by most girls by rolling the skirts up as soon as they were a safe distance from the school.

Some girls, who were a little bolder, hemmed their skirts up at mid-knee to avoid the bulk that rolling created at the waist. That was a mistake, however, since the nuns at the academy conducted random spot-checks for infractions of the rule. The girls were told to kneel on the floor while the sister in charge went around making sure every skirt touched the floor with ease. While some of the girls who had hemmed their skirts were also cagey enough to scrunch themselves down for maximum floor-touching, others were not. The girls caught short-skirted were sent to the sewing lab for an immediate, practical lesson in lowering a hem, while no-nonsense notes were prepared to send home to the parents.

It was 1962. Skirts were getting shorter. The new, shorter skirts weren't called "mini-skirts"; they weren't quite that short yet. The one-inch-below-the-knee fashion was on its way out, although Harper's Bazaar and Glamour were still holding the length there.

Carol and JoJo were about the same height. JoJo was blonde, blue-eyed, fair-skinned and stocky. Carol was brunette, hazel-eyed, creamy-skinned, and thin.

They walked side by side up the ramp leading to Woolworth's, pushed the doors open, and headed for the ladies' room behind the lunch counter. There, they reteased their hair, spritzed hairspray til they gagged from the fumes, applied black mascara, pinched their cheeks, and colored their mouths with white lipstick that only hinted at pink. Extreme hairstyles, eye makeup, and garish lipstick all were forbidden at the academy. JoJo puckered up and blew several kisses at her image in the mirror.

"Hurry up," said Carol. "So we have time for something to eat."

They emerged from the ladies' room feeling glamorous, and headed toward the lunch counter. They climbed up on tall stools, and settled in an advantageous spot. It was advantageous because, from where they sat, they could see all the activity outside through the store's windowed front. They could also check themselves from time to time in the long mirror that ran the length of the back wall facing the counter. They arranged their skirts for decent leg exposure--but with care--the exposure had to seem accidental.

JoJo thrashed around in her purse for several seconds, and fished out a few coins and a package of Salems. She lit a cigarette with a match, formed an "O" with her lips, and blew out the flame slowly, watching herself in the mirror all the while.

"They got apple dumplings today," said Carol.

"Umm," said JoJo, who continued to amuse herself with smoking techniques. They ordered--hot apple dumplings in cinnamon sauce, and Cokes--and ate quickly. The boys' Catholic high school had already dismissed its students. Very soon, "Special" busses would spill out the boys in front of Woolworth's, where they would stand around idly, waiting for transfer busses to take them home. There would be hundreds of them. Carol and JoJo would be waiting--but not for the boys. They would be waiting for HIM--Lonnie James. Blonde, gray-eyed, full-lipped, twenty-two-year-old, married Lonnie James was a bus driver with a Southern accent who said, "Yeahhh" just like Elvis Presley.

"Didja hear about Janice Kowalski?" asked JoJo.

"Uh-uh." JoJo was amazed--it had been all over school. "What happened?" Carol asked.

"Sister Clement took her to the bathroom and stuck her head under the sink because her hair was ratted too high."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Took a ruler over to her, stuck it through her hair, and measured from the head up. It was ratted over an inch. Somebody said 'three inches,' but I don't know . . . it's possible, though. Janice Kowalski is kind of extreme."

"That's a bitch."

"Yeah," said JoJo. "I saw her in the hall this afternoon and she looked

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awful, just awful. Her hair was flat--straight as a stick--and stiff too. From all the hairspray."

"Ick-o. How embarrassing."

"Yeah . . . I swear, nuns have no feelings. None at all. That's why they call them 'nuns. They giggled.

"I'll say," said Carol. "Expect us all to look like zombies. So wrapped up in 'how many inches this' and 'how many inches that'."

"Whoooa," squealed JoJo. They exchanged the looks that accompany adolescent innuendo, and giggled some more. "The whole thing's sooo stupid," continued JoJo. "I mean, Jackie Kennedy rats her hair and ya don't hear any nuns saying she looks like a freak. Besides, if Janice's parents don't care how high she rats it, why should--was that him?"

"Nah . . . but we better get outside anyway."

They climbed down from their stools and stood in line at the cash register. Woolworth's was bustling. It was one of the last downtown stores with a wooden floor, and the clunking of feet rat-a-tatted rhythmically with the chatter of voices and the clatter of dishes from the lunch counter. The store was bright and yellow, a contrast to the gray outside. It was mid-November--one of those damp, cool days that foreshadows the winter to come, but a leftover crispness of October lingered, not wanting to let go.

Carol and JoJo watched the busses pull in one behind the other and empty quickly--a disemboweling which left the skin and bones of the busses standing like the frameworks of new buildings waiting to be filled in. People were everywhere. A boy walked by carrying a transister radio. The Crystals were singing: "He's a rebel and he'll never ever be any good . . ."

"There he is," shouted Carol who wasn't really shouting--she just had a loud voice. "Ooooh, there he is."

"Where? I can't see."

"Behind Number Five--see?'

"Did he change the sign yet . . . no--yes, he changing it now. Great! He's got the Lidice run--oh, he's getting out. He's coming this way."

"Pretend we didn't see him," said Carol. She turned to face JoJo.

"What should we talk about while we're pretending not to see him?"

"Ha, ha--funny, funny. Is he still coming?"

"Yeah. Oh, he's sooo cute," JoJo said, keeping him in the corner of her eye. "What a doll!"

"Shut up, you dope. He's gonna hear. How close is he now?"

"Hi, girls," the familiar voice drawled. Carol stifled a groan. JoJo's legs turned to mush.

"Hi," said JoJo.

"Oh," said Carol, turning abruptly. "Hi, Lonnie."

"I see you got the Lidice run today," said JoJo.

"Yeahhh." Elvis. JoJo's stomach fluttered. Her spine tingled. "Gonna grab a quick cuppa coffee. You gals gonna ride to the end of the line with me today?"

"Sure," said Carol. "Why not?"

"Okay. See ya in a little." He went into Woolworth's.

"I see you got the Lidice run today," said Carol sarcastically. "I told you to pretend we didn't see him. God, you want him to think we're in love with him or something?"

"No," said JoJo. But she did want him to think that. Because she was in love with him. Of course, so was Carol. But that didn't matter. Neither one of them was going to "get" him anyway. That thought never even entered their minds. They would have been terrified if he ever made a "move"--a little thrilled, yes, but more terrified. He was married--he did more than just hug and kiss. He did--IT.

Carol and JoJo headed toward the Lidice bus. They wanted to be first in line so they would get the seat closest to Lonnie. Of course, Carol would get the one right behind him, so close to him she could smell his after-shave. JoJo would get the seat across from Carol, facing her. That was all right, though--she'd be facing Lonnie too. He'd only be able to see Carol in the rear-view mirror, but he could look at JoJo straight on--all he had to do was turn his head a little to the right. Then, JoJo would cross her legs--sooo sophisticated--and swing her bobby-socked, penny-loafered foot. She'd let the loafer dangle from her toes as her foot swung--a wanton invitation to spend the next several years kissing her hungry, relatively inexperienced lips. Oh--heaven.

The Lidice bus would travel a route through the near-west side of Joliet, where JoJo lived, and then veer off toward Crest Hill, where Carol lived. The girls' houses were in the same general area, but separated by about three miles. JoJo didn't live far from town. Her house was within walking distance--less than a mile away. The ride on the bus to her stop was much too painfully short. That was why she rode with Carol out to the end of the line and got off the bus on its way back downtown. Carol's stop was bout ten blocks from the end of the line, and she, too, got off on the bus's return trip. When the bus returned to town, its sign was changed to "Forest Park," and then took a route through Joliet's near-east side. Back at Woolworth's, after the east-side run, the bus be-

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came 'Lidice' again. Sometimes, Carol and JoJo took the whole ride--through Lidice to its end, back to town, through Forest Park, back to town, then back out to Lidice again. Just to be with him.

When they reached the end of a line early, Lonnie would stop the bus and wait--it had to leave on time. Then, he would turn around in his seat and they could really talk--small talk, sprinkled with innuendo and double entendre. Sometimes, Lonnie would say something suggestive that neither Carol or JoJo understood, but they giggled anyway, not wanting to let on that they didn't know everything there was to know. Once, he said something about a woman being a squirrel. Carol giggled.

But JoJo asked, "What's a squirrel?" Carol shot her a disapproving look.

"Well," said Lonnie, "let's put it this way. You know what a squirrel does with its tail?"

"Oh," said JoJo. She laughed, but didn't really know what squirrels did do with their tails. Carol didn't either.

They rode with him nearly every day. When he had another route, they rode with him anyway, transferring in town to their own bus later. When he had a day off, they were in agony. His days off, though, were somewhat of a relief to JoJo. She had been telling her mother she was staying after school for basketball practice. Sometimes, her mother said things that made JoJo think she was suspicious. "Basketball practice sure ran late today," she would say, and JoJo wouldn't answer, just shrug her shoulders as if to say, "That's the way the ball bounces, Ma." But then, she'd feel wicked. And her secret was wicked--she was convinced of it. Had she been riding around town with a boy her own age, it would have been bad enough. But Lonnie was no boy. And, to top it off, he was married. The lies made everything dirty.

Still, at night, before she fell asleep, JoJo pretended Lonnie was with her, saying wonderful things, kissing her. At night, JoJo and Lonnie were the only two people in the world.

JoJo thought Carol probably had the same fantasies, but they never talked about them. Christmas approached.

"We should buy Lonnie a present," said Carol one Saturday afternoon.

"Yeah. We should."

"What could we get him?" The two girls were sitting on the floor in Carol's basement-turned-family-room. Both wore genuine, bleeding-Madras slacks, but in different patterns.

"I don't know." They sat quietly for a couple of minutes, thinking.

Then, "I know," said JoJo. "A lighter. A silver lighter. Expensive. With his initials."

"Perfect," said Carol.

On the last day of school before Christmas vacation, they rode out to the end of the line with him. Large, lacy snowflakes were falling, landing softly, silently, melting into long wet streaks on the windows of the bus. They had already been to Forest Park, and had reached the Lidice end early. It was dark, a four-thirty winter darkness, muffled by the delicately falling snow. Lonnie left the bus running for heat. JoJo's stomach tightened with anticipation.

"Merry Christmas," Carol said, handing him a small, carefully-wrapped present.

"Merry Christmas," repeated JoJo.

"You bought me a present?" he asked, a smile brightening his face. His teeth were marvelous--white, straight, gleaming--just like in the toothpaste commercials. But better because Lonnie was for real.

"Open it up," said Carol. And he did. "It's got your initials on the bottom."

"It's beautiful," he said. "I don't know what to say . . . Thanks, thank you both."

JoJo watched him, a strange, exquisite feeling gripping her. Carol's eyes glittered in the dimly-lit bus. He got up and hugged them--first Carol, then JoJo--big, crushing hugs, saying "thanks" to each as he did so.

Carol, it seemed to JoJo, accepted the hug casually, as though a moment like this happened every day. She, on the other hand, was overwhelmed, kept repeating to herself, "He touched me . . . he touched me . . . hugged me." It was even better than that day she had waited all afternoon in the drizzling rain for John Kennedy to shake her hand. "This hand touched his," she had boasted afterwards to her friends, and then gave them time enough to examine her palm for traces of Kennedy left behind in her skin.

"You shouldn't have," Lonnie said. "You really shouldn't." He checked his watch. "Oh-oh, we're late. Gotta go." He got back into his seat, put the bus in gear, and it hurried its way back to town.

"G'bye," said JoJo as she got off the bus at her stop. She watched it disappear down Hickory Street. She began to walk home, slowly. His eyes, his smile, appeared over and over in her mind. She recreated the scene on the bus again and again. Suddenly she loved winter, loved the snowflakes, loved the big, black sky empty of stars that night. She heard a church bell in the distance. It sounded like someone had covered the clapper with layers of cloth. She stood still and smelled the night. It was fresh--cold and fresh.

A lone streetlight shone at the end of her block. Snowflakes fluttered

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under its metal shade. She pirouetted--three or four turns--down the street, and stopped. Listened. It was so quiet. Tears started to form in her eyes. She fought them--she was too close to home. Her mother would ask the reason for them. What could she say?

Once, when she and her family had been out for a drive, the night air had gotten to her and she had cried. Her grade-school graduation was nearing, and JoJo was in love with Ernie Sunshine. Sunshine wasn't his real name, but Ernie reminded JoJo of morning, and she had given the name to him. Ernie didn't know it; he hardly noticed JoJo. He had worked for JoJo's stepfather, and when JoJo cleaned the offices, she would sneak peeks at him in the paint-room when he wasn't looking. Graduation, Ernie, the night air, had gotten to her, and she had cried.

Later, her mother asked, "Why were you crying in the car?"

"I don't know." She really didn't. If she had, she wouldn't have been able to explain. Her mother kept pestering, asking if she was crying about this or crying about that, but she never guessed.

"Well, then, what <u>was</u> it?" her mother insisted.

"I don't know."

"There must be a reason. Only crazy people cry for no reason." She stressed the "crazy," and JoJo began to think she might be.

Why did her mother always interfere? She seemed to cheapen JoJo's feelings, wanting her to say things that couldn't be said, things that belonged in the heart and to thoughts, things that had no words that were adequate to express them, things too terribly large to fit into words. She wiped at her eyes before she got home. Ma wasn't going to ruin it this time.

"Where've you been?"

"Basketball practice. I told you," said JoJo. Why can't she leave me alone? Why does she always have to ruin things? Asking questions. Taking me away. Making me think of dumb stuff like, "Why are you so late?"

"Set the table," her mother commanded.

Set the table, set the table. Who cares about setting the table? Who wants to eat? Leave me alone.

"I happen to know that basketball is over. It ended two weeks ago. I want to know where you've been every night after school."

Caught in a lie. Again. How does she find these things out? Why couldn't her mother stay out of her life? Why di she always have to poke her nose in JoJo's business? She could never get away with anything--<u>never</u>.

A quick answer was called for.

"Me and Carol've been stopping downtown after school. For French fries," she blurted. It was part true. JoJo's mother had been sending her to a doctor regularly for weight loss. Going off her diet was a lesser evil than flirting with a married man--so much "lesser," that the two sins weren't even in the same class.

"It doesn't take two hours to eat French fries."

"We don't watch the time, Ma. We talk. And don't pay attention."

"Well, you will from now on. I want you home no later than four after this. And, for lying, you can stay home for two weeks and no phone calls."

"I thought you'd be mad--about the French fries. Two weeks is the whole Christmas vacation."

"Don't talk back. You'll stay home. And no phone. And when you get back to school, I want you home no later than four. And consider yourself lucky I don't smack you."

A world can collapse so suddenly. One minute, everything is heaven, and the next . . . well . . . JoJo felt it now. She thought about no more end-of-the-line bus rides, no more time spent talking to--oh, it hurt to think of his name. It was almost obscene to think of his name here in this house where it didn't belong. She had to resign herself to not seeing him any more. She knew she couldn't sneak now. Things had gone too far. Her parents had driven around before, checking up on her, catching her in all the places she wasn't supposed to be. Like sitting in Billie Limacher's front yard with Donna Pierce and Margie Sullivan. She wasn't supposed to "hang around" with those girls. They were "boy-crazy."

There was no way now. She'd never see Lonnie again. It would kill her--she was certain. She began to ache somewhere, ache all over.

She ached the whole Christmas vacation away, cried at night, remembered Lonnie's face, ached some more. She couldn't even tell Carol because she couldn't use the phone. It wouldn't have helped much anyway. Without Lonnie, life would be unbearable. It was unbearable already. The aching, the aching. She wanted to die. "Oh God, let something happen. Please . . . please," she whispered in bed.

The Almighty didn't intervene. After Christmas vacation was over, JoJo got home every day before four. Carol continued to ride with Lonnie to the end of the line. Afterwards, she would tell JoJo about the ride. But JoJo didn't want to hear--or did she? Everytime Carol talked about him the aching came back.

"Listen, Carol," she said one day late in January. "Don't tell me about Lonnie any more. I don't want to hear about him."

"Okay, okay. I only thought you wanted to hear."

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"Well, I don't. Not one word." It was a lie. She wanted to hear, wanted to know his every move, wanted to picutre him in her mind while Carol filled in the dialogue. But it ached too much.

One Saturday in March, JoJo was scouring the bathtub, singing along with Ned Miller--"From a jack to a king . . . from loneliness to a wedding ring . . ."--when the phone rang.

"Is this JoJo Montgomery?" a female voice asked.

"Yeah."

"MY name is Marlene James. Lonnie's wife. I want to talk to you right away--today. About you and him and somebody named Carol."

"Uh, I dont' know if I can. We got relatives comin' in from out of town."

"It's important. I gotta talk to you today. Maybe I can speak to your mother, explain the situation to her?"

"Uh, she's not home--she's in Chicago. At the airport. Picking up my Grampa."

"When will she be back? I can call later. I can come over and wait."

"Maybe I can get away . . . what time?"

"How about three? How do I get to your house?"

"Uh, could I, maybe meet you someplace?"

"I guess so . . . How 'bout Page's Restaurant?"

"Okay. I'll be there at three."

Thank God, Ma didn't answer the phone, JoJo thought. Oh shit! Now what am I gonna do? God, what am I gonna do?

She told her mother she had to go to the library, had to do research for an English paper that was due Monday. She'd forgotten until just this minute.

She sat in Page's Restaurant with a Coke in front of her. She was early. She waited, fidgeting. She was terrified. The Rebels wailed out "Wild Weekend" on the jukebox. The saxophones and guitars assaulted her ears. She had liked the tune before today. Now, she hated it. She smoked a Salem half down, stubbed it out in the ashtray, lit another, wiggled her leg, tapped her toe, rubbed her face, picked at an inflamed pimple, scratched her neck, felt nauseous.

Then, Marlene James entered. JoJo had never seen her before, but she recognized Lonnie's wife the minute she saw her--it might have been something in her face. An older lady trailed behind the sober-faced Marlene. JoJo trembled, felt exquisitely alone.

"Are you JoJo Montgomery?"

"Y-yes," JoJo answered, clearing a lump in her throat. She began to shake.

"I'm Marlene. This is my mother." They were ganging up on her, JoJo thought. She felt as though any moment her air supply would be cut off--she was near to suffocating now.

"H-hi," said JoJo. It seemed silly to say "Hi," as though one were meeting a new person at a school mixer. "Hi" belonged in a kids' world, not in this very adult situation.

Marlene and her mother sat down in the booth opposite JoJo. Marlene ordered for herself and her mother--coffee. She asked if JoJo would like another Coke. No, no, thank you. Two pairs of eyes bored through JoJo's bones until the coffee came.

"Do you know a girl named Carol?"

"Yes."

"I think my husband is having an affair with her."

JoJo choked on cigarette smoke and coughed violently. Then, "An aff-fair? With Carol?"

"Yes."

"Oh no, that couldn't be. That couldn't be." This was a soap opera--it couldn't be happening.

"How well do you know this Carol?" She said "this" and "Carol" like the words were tainted meat rotting in her mouth.

"She's my best friend."

"What's her last name?"

"Carol's? Carol's last name?"

"Yes. Carol's last name."

"He's not having an affair with Carol," said JoJo. "Affair" was a hard word for her to manage with any seriousness. It was an adult word from a whole other world. JoJo said it with difficulty. "He couldn't be. She wouldn't. I mean, she <u>isn't</u>. It isn't possible--maybe it's another Carol. Here . . . here," she dug into her purse. "Here's a picture of Carol.

"That's her. Sure looks like the one that's been riding with him on the bus. Look, Ma."

"It's her," said the mother, nodding.

"She rides the bus. We <u>both</u> ride the bus. To--kill time, that's all. We ride with him all the time. We talk. That's all."

"Well, Lon <u>is</u> having an affair. I'm sure of it."

"Not with Carol," JoJo's voice cracked. "She's only fifteen years old. We just ride the bus."

"Ask about the lighter," said the mother.

"Yeah. This Carol gave Lon a silver lighter with his initials. You know anything about that?"

"We both gave it to him. It was a Christmas present. Like you give to the mailman."

"You give your mailman expensive silver lighters for Christmas?"

"We never thought about the price. We knew he needed one. So we bought it. It didn't mean anything. It was just a Christmas present." JoJo was close to tears.

Marlene James' expression changed, as though she seemed to realize that she was only dealing with a couple of stupid kids. She ended the visit

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by saying, "You girls don't know what you're messing with. Lon's a married man, and you're just a couple of silly . . . well, I'd watch my step if I were you."

"Yes. Yes. You're right, Mrs. James. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."

When she got home, JoJo phoned Carol and told her about the meeting. Carol laughed.

"That's so ridiculous. Me having an affair."

"That's what I told her, Carol. I told her it was impossible. But, really, I was sooo scared. I mean, if my Ma even sniffed any of this, I'd be dead by now. This is probably the worst mess I've ever been in."

"Yeah. But we didn't do anything."

"Maybe not. But it was more than just riding out to the end of the line and talking. I mean, we wouldn't have ridden around with him if he wasn't so cute. Or given the lighter. You know that."

"I guess so."

"Well--ah--"

"Whatsamatter? Somebody there?"

"Yeah."

"Your Ma?"

"Yeah," said JoJo, adding in a whisper, "in and out, in and out, you know." And then in a normal voice, she said, "It's close to suppertime. I guess I gotta go."

"Yeah, okay. I'll see ya Monday."

Carol hung up the phone and smiled. "Thanks, JoJo," she muttered. "I'll hafta be more careful in the future. No more rides to the end of the line--on the bus, that is." She giggled.

As JoJo lay in bed, she went over it all again. She shuddered. His smile appeared--but blurry--as though recalled from a dream of years ago. She heard him say "Yeahhh." The word was a fuzzy echo. She tried to put his face together, tried to see him whole again, but she seemed to have forgotten some of the features. Where was that face she had memorized so well? She tried again--and again--It was no use. She got the jawline wrong, the eyebrows too thin, the forehead too low.

I've lost him, she thought. Imagine. He's fading away, and I don't really even care. Except . . . it's kinda sad. Why? Maybe I didn't really love him--that's a horrible thought. Of course I did. I loved him. I did . . . didn't I?

The furnace clicked on. A soft, blowing hum breathed through the quiet house. The muffled buzz of her stepfather's snoring down the hall seemed to regress--further and further away. Her heavy eyelids closed slowly . . .

It was early 1963. John Kennedy was still president, although the tragedy was nearing. Now, however, the world was getting younger every day. People were talking about civil liberties and human dignity for the black man. The Kingston Trio and Joan Baez climbed the charts. Soon, the Beatles would "invade". And John Lennon's Liverpool accent would break at least a million hearts.

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John Stobart

VICTORY

The sky was putrid pink, tinted a saffron glaze and graced by dainty grey clouds. It was a night to worship the moons, none of which were visible, of course, but whose pollen permeated the Earth in a protective mantle, a sort of gossamer shroud repelling the sun's deadly rays and allowing the small band of Earthlings to rest days so that they had the energy to bask in lunar light.

Hydrangela was blooming. She lost count of the times she had felt the Earth tremble. Her lush lactations had lured legions of lovers, mostly Blacks and Soldiers, but also a platoon of Reds and one stray Fire to her bower.

Such ecstasy was rare of course. The first in millenia for her, and probably her last, now that the death rays had broken into the Pharoah's tomb and exposed her vital dormancy some ten thousand years after her burial.

Ozymandius would have been surprised to find that only she, of his creatures, survived the victory of Arcturus over on Earth. Her progeny would thrive now, due to lack of competition from those crude photosynthetics who had been chlorophylled to elephantine proportions, grass engulfing

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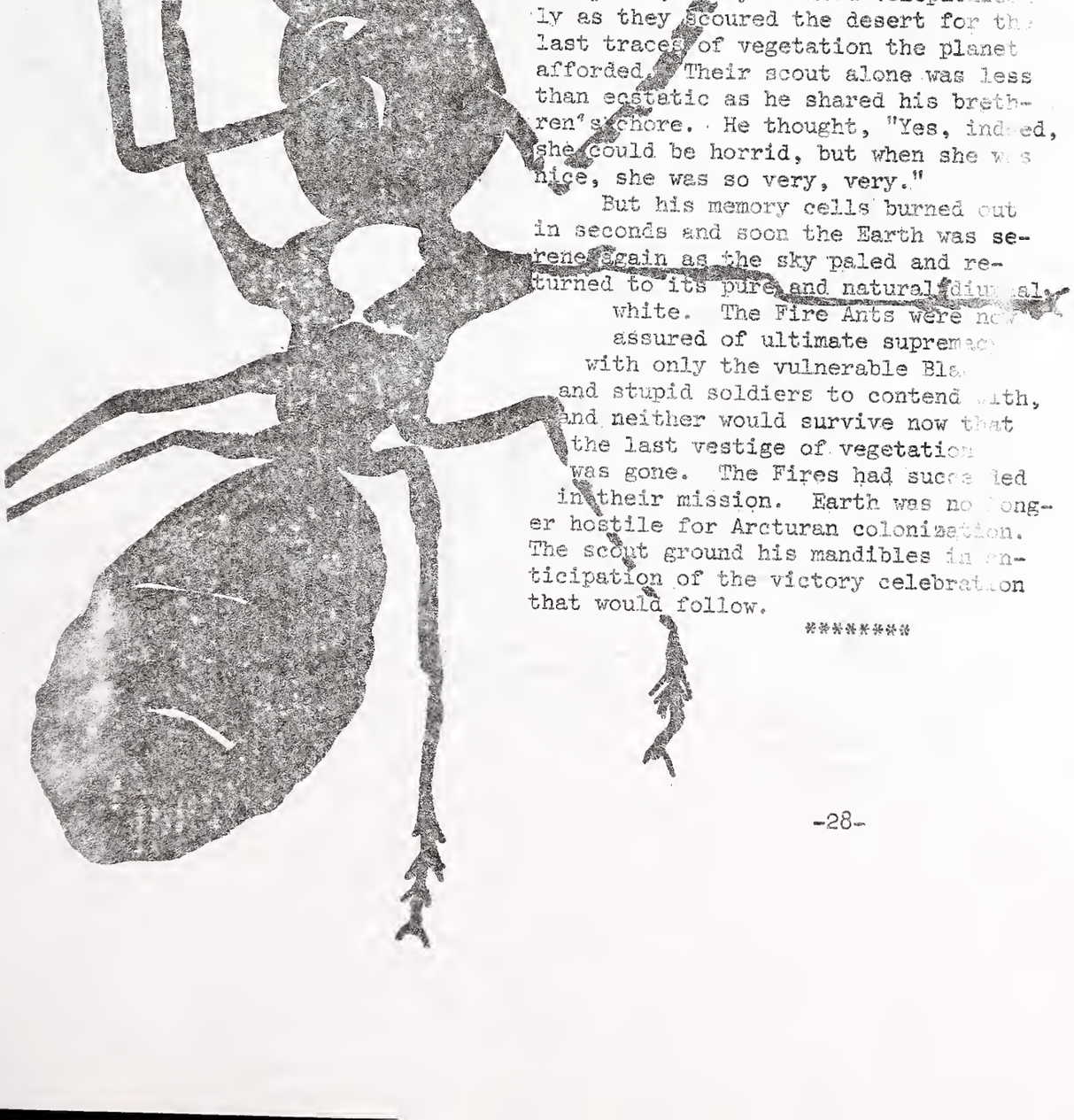
The Empire State Building in one day, the rain forests indescribably gross. Hydrangela must be forever grateful to those factories that produced zillions of flourocarbons that ultimately destroyed the ozone layers shielding Earth from the Sun's lethal rays. Then the silly plants just O.D.-ed in their lust, and super-saturated themselves into a new shield as they grew beyond the troposphere in twenty-four hours, crystallized, and died--leaving a canopy that allowed Hydrangela just the right blend of diffused sunlight and moonglow for a glorious orgy.

For six nights she had spread her seed and now she planned to rest, but she knew that it was a good night to die. After all, she had cast her image bountifully on her world and performed magnificently the absolutely divine act of propagation, to which everything was subordinate, really not even comparable, a difference in kind, not degree. She could rest now, knowing that she was the archetype of archetypes--Super Mom. The moons would do the rest.

Little did she know that her fate had been sealed. That last lover, the Fire, was a scout, and his message had been sent hours before. Hordes of ants were savaging her babies who, after all, were a threat to the superior species, the Fire Ants, who must eliminate all succulents or cease to survive. "Antennae-power," they chanted telepathically as they scoured the desert for the last traces of vegetation the planet afforded. Their scout alone was less than ecstatic as he shared his brethren's chore. He thought, "Yes, indeed, she could be horrid, but when she was nice, she was so very, very."



But his memory cells burned out in seconds and soon the Earth was serene again as the sky paled and returned to its pure and natural diurnal white. The Fire Ants were now assured of ultimate supremacy with only the vulnerable Blacks and stupid soldiers to contend with, and neither would survive now that the last vestige of vegetation was gone. The Fires had succeeded in their mission. Earth was no longer hostile for Arcturan colonization. The scout ground his mandibles in anticipation of the victory celebration that would follow.

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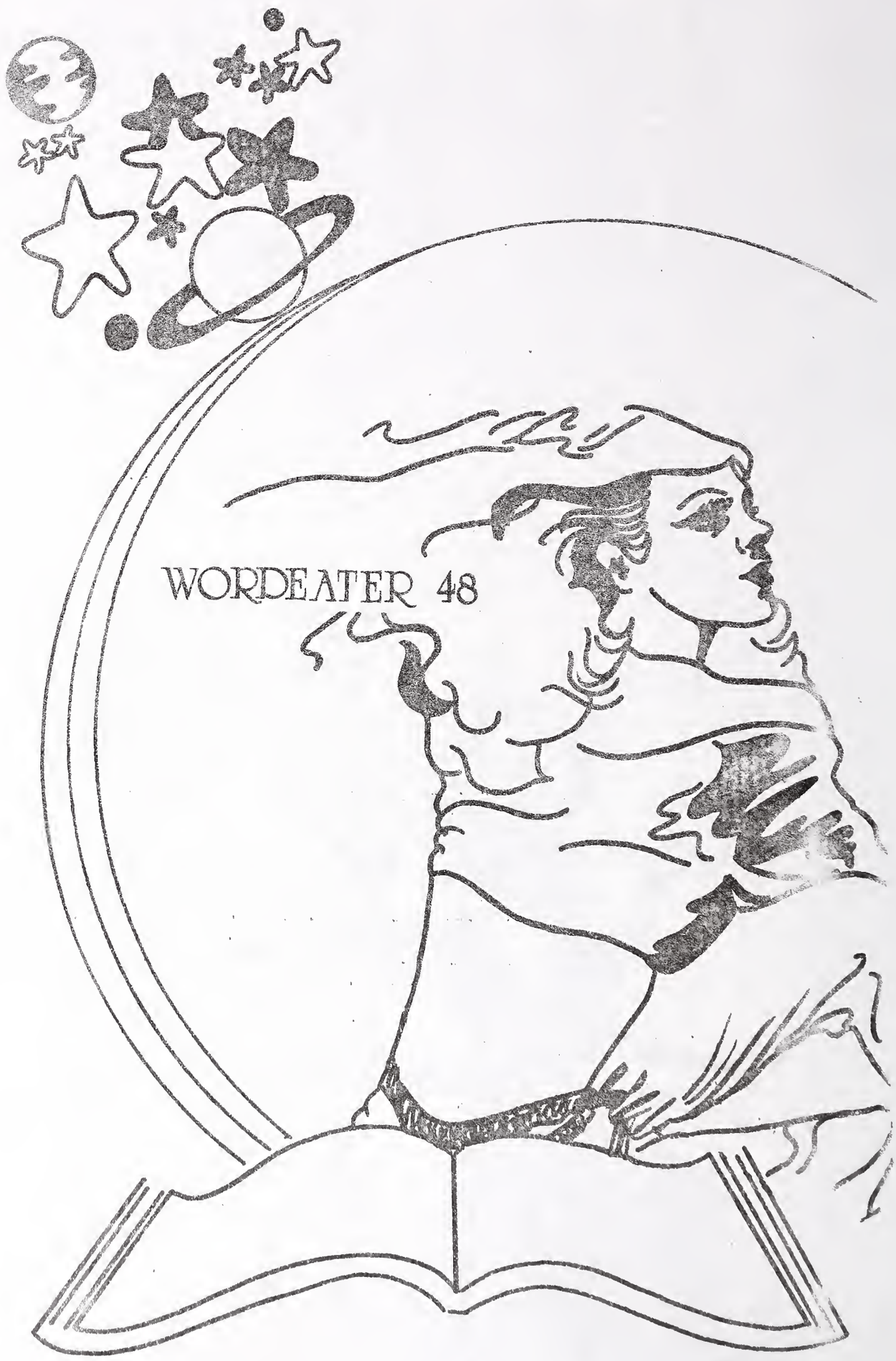
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